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# STANDARD TESTS AND A BASAL METHOD OF TEACHING READING

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Must the school superintendent depend upon his unsupported opinion of the relative value of different methods of teaching reading, or can he determine beyond a reasonable doubt which one produces the best results?

This investigation represents an attempt to answer this vexed question on a more authoritative basis than the statements of enthusiastic book agents or of a superficial study of the different systems produced by publishers. The assumption is made that a reading system may be selected because of the efficiency of the results obtained, and that the logical place to test these results is in the third grade. By the time this grade has been reached the child is old enough to make testing possible, and after three years' use any method should reveal its value. In the later grades method is of diminishing importance, and other factors may operate to influence the results.

In making the investigation two schools in the same city were selected, in each of which a different basal method was employed. The social status of the children was practically identical, and the teachers in the two schools were believed to be of practically equal teaching ability. All tests were conducted by one examiner, who also rated the papers. Seven tests were selected, designed to test the reading ability of the children from every angle. Some of these could be given to the entire group, while others were given to the pupils individually. The tests were made upon reading-matter unfamiliar to all of the children.

The specific elements investigated were: rate of oral reading, rate of silent reading, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Directions given to the examiner were as follows:

### TEST I. RATE OF ORAL READING

Choose a selection from a reading-book which has not been used by any group and is suited to the capacity of the grade. Give the pupils individually a three-minute test. Reckon rate by lines. Count a fraction of a line more than one-half a full line. Ignore less than half a line. Allow the child to read without comment. Note time when he begins and the point which he has reached at the close of the three-minute period. Permit the child to finish the paragraph.

The selection made was "Five Out of One Shell," Hans Andersen, William's *Choice Literature*, Book I.

### TEST II. RATE OF SILENT READING, QUANTITY ELEMENT

Follow the same method as in Test I, using a different selection. To determine the exact time of beginning the examiner may read to the child a part of the preceding page and stop at the bottom. The child then turns the page and begins his silent reading. Tell the child he is to be questioned on what he has read. At the close of the three-minute period have the child close his book and indicate the substance of the last line read. This will prevent any tendency to exaggerate the amount. If necessary repeat the test and take the average.

The selection chosen was "The Daisy," Hans Andersen, William's *Choice Literature*, Book I.

### TEST III. SILENT READING, TIME ELEMENT

Make a selection from an unfamiliar reader requiring approximately three minutes. This is determined by preliminary tests with average children. Indicate to the child the place on the page where he is to begin, and note the time. The exact time of completion is denoted by the turning of the page.

The selection used was, "Piccola," *The Richmond Second Reader.*

### TEST IV. ENGLISH VOCABULARY, CLASS EXERCISE

Thorndike Visual Vocabulary Test according to directions.

### TEST V. COMPREHENSION OF SELECTION READ TO THE CLASS

Read to the pupils a selection which includes ten specific ideas. Children then reproduce in writing. Score by counting the number of ideas reproduced.

The following paragraph was used:

### THE NEEDLE

Hans Andersen

There was once a needle who thought herself so fine as to be fit only for embroidery.

"See, I am coming with a train," said the needle, drawing a long thread after her; but there was no knot in the thread.

Fingers placed the point of the needle against the cook's slipper. There was a crack in the leather which had to be sewed together.

"What coarse work!" said the needle. "I shall never get through. I shall break!—I am breaking!" and sure enough she broke. "Did I not say so?" said the needle. "I know I am too fine for such work as that."

"This needle is quite useless for sewing now," said the fingers; but the cook dropped some sealing wax on the needle, and used it to fasten her collar.

"Now I am a breast pin," said the needle.

### TEST VI. COMPREHENSION OF SELECTION READ SILENTLY

Allow children five minutes to read a selection containing ten specific ideas. Immediately thereafter have them reproduce in writing what they have read. Score by counting the ideas reproduced.

The paragraph used was as follows:

### THE FIR TREE

Hans Andersen

Out in the forest was a pretty little fir tree. It stood where it could have the sunlight, and where there was plenty of air. It had many larger companions, pines as well as firs. The little fir tree was not happy. It wanted to become larger. It did not care for the warm sun and fresh air; it took no notice of the children who had come out to look for berries. But the children noticed it, and when they had a whole basket of berries, or had strung berries on a straw, they would sit down by the little fir tree and say, "How pretty and how small this one is!"

### TEST VII. SILENT READING

Kelly Reading Test according to directions.

The results obtained from these tests appear in Table I. In School I, using the X method, the A and B sections were together in a single class. In School II, using the Y method, the two sections were in different rooms and the results were given separately. The median attainment is the one used. The division into A and B groups is made on the basis of general capacity, the A being the more advanced.

According to Table I the median attainment in silent reading of the A and B sections in School I was 10 lines per minute. The A section in School II gave a median rate of 9 lines per minute, and the B section reached the same standard. In Test II the mixed group in School I read at the rate of 13.5 lines per minute, surpassing the A group in School II by 1.8 lines. Test III is based upon the time element. The median time required by the mixed group of School I to read the assigned selection was 2 minutes and 38 seconds; the A section in School II needed 3 minutes and 29 seconds to read the same amount, and the B section required 3 minutes and 37 seconds. In no instance does the mixed group of School I fail to surpass the achievement of the A group of School II. Test I is the only record where the B group of School II reaches the same standard as the A section. Assuming that the grading in the school is in accordance with the abilities of the children, this fact alone furnishes evidence that the basal method of reading employed in the schools is the real cause for the uniformly higher record made by School I.

TABLE I

SEVEN READING TESTS, GRADE III, 1917

| | NUMBER OF TEST | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII |
| School I, A and B sections, method X | 10 | 13.5 | Min. Sec.<br>2 38 | 5.10 | 4.9 | 6 | 10.7 |
| School II, A section, method Y | 9 | 11.7 | 3 29 | 3.92 | 4.5 | 5 | 4.2 |
| School II, B section, method Y | 9 | 11.0 | 3 37 | 2.63 | 3.6 | 4 | 2.5 |

The suggestion was made that these results might be due to a class of exceptional ability in School I for this single year. Teachers are well aware that such classes are occasionally found. Accordingly the records were filed and nothing was said of the results obtained. In 1918 the testing was resumed along the same general lines, with a third school in a different section of the city included in the scope of the test. This school employs the same system of reading as is used in School I. The enrolment had so changed that two distinct sections A and B appeared in each school. Granting that School I had possessed a class of exceptional ability in 1917, it was highly improbable that the same condition would be reproduced the following year, and in any event the inclusion of a third school removed any doubts of this character. As has been indicated, Schools I and III followed the same basal method in teaching reading, while School II used a different one.

In view of the extreme difficulty and amount of time consumed in giving tests requiring examination of individual children, the tests in 1918 are restricted to those which could be given in groups.

In Table II schools are designated by the same numbers as were employed in 1917, and the test numbers correspond with those given in the previous table. Here again appear the same general conditions found in 1917. The B section in each school is uniformly less efficient than the A section, which indicates that the ratings are not due to accident, but are produced by a real difference in the reading ability of the pupils. School II, with only four exceptions, makes a lower record than the corresponding section of the other two schools, using the same system of reading.

TABLE II

FOUR READING TESTS, GRADE III, 1918

| | NUMBER OF TEST | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | IV | V | VI | VII |
| School I, A section........ | 36.5 | 6.2 | 6.9 | 7.10 |
| Method X, B section...... | 21.0 | 4.8 | 4.5 | 2.60 |
| School II, A section....... | 21.5 | 4.6 | 6.0 | 5.40 |
| Method Y, B section....... | 9.5 | 3.0 | 3.7 | 1.20 |
| School III, A section...... | 34.0 | 4.0 | 5.8 | 10.13 |
| Method X, B section...... | 9.0 | 3.8 | 3.6 | 2.60 |

A comparison of School I and School II, where similar types of children are in attendance, shows, with no exception, a superior record for the X method of reading as a basal system.

The collected statistics furnish a basis for investigating the extent to which the reading method produces deviation within the respective groups. There is no apparent reason for believing that the method employed would influence variability. On the contrary, it is a natural assumption that this factor would be determined wholly by the character of the class; that a group of varying capacity in the beginning would show at the time of testing the same lack of uniform attainment, whatever method had been employed.

Although there are some exceptions, the table of variabilities seems to justify this assumption. The condition suggested is decidedly apparent in Tests II and VII, 1917, where the combined groups in School I have a greater average deviation than either of the sections in School II, but is reversed for Tests I and IV. This absence of a uniform tendency indicates that the element of variability may be disregarded altogether.

The table suggests a much better grading for the different sections in 1918 than was found in 1917. Nothing is disclosed by

TABLE III

AVERAGE DEVIATIONS, 1917

| | Number of Test | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII |
| | | | Min. Sec. | | | | |
| School I, A and B sections, method X | 2.3 | 5.1 | 33 5 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 3.3 |
| School II, A section, method Y | 2.4 | 2.9 | 24 0 | 2.3 | 1.2 | 1.6 | 2.3 |
| School II, B section method Y | 3.5 | 3.6 | 34 0 | 2.6 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.8 |

AVERAGE DEVIATIONS, 1918

| | Number of Test | | | | Number of Test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | V | VI | VII | | V | VI | VII |
| School I, A section, method X | 1.1 | 1.1 | 3.2 | School II, B section, method Y | 1.7 | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| School I, B section, method X | 1.4 | 1.5 | 2.6 | School II, A section, method X | 1.1 | 1.5 | 2.2 |
| School II, A section, method Y | 1.5 | 1.5 | 3.4 | School III, B section, method X | 1.5 | 1.9 | 1.8 |

the variability table that seems to disprove the indication apparent in the ratings obtained by the respective sections.

While the scope of these tests is too limited and the number of pupils involved too few to warrant an authoritative statement that one of the two systems of reading is more efficient than the other, the general tendency of the results is unmistakable. If the tests were given in other school systems, or repeated several times in a single system with a resulting similar tendency, any element of doubt would be finally removed. They certainly imply that it is possible for the school superintendent to make a selection of a basal system of reading on a more authoritative basis than mere opinion.